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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, October 7, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Learning to Talk." Information from an article by Smiley Blanton in "The Parents Magazine." Menu and recipe from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

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Reginald is almost four years old, but, his mother told me, he hasn't begun to speak yet.

"He inherits that quiet streak from his father's side," she explained. All the men in that family are silent people and only say a word or two when it's absolutely necessary. As far as I'm concerned, I'm pleased that Reggy isn't talking yet. I want him to stay a baby just as long as he can."

When I told Uncle Ebenezzer about this he looked disturbed. In fact he shook his head very seriously. "I don't believe your friends the child psychologists would agree with Reginald's mother," he said. "It's a strange thing that so many parents and teachers are indifferent to speech defects in children, when they go to no end of trouble to look after defects in posture, poor teeth, tonsils and so on. They seem to think speech just comes by nature and any speech difficulties will be remedied by nature. Why speech has to be learned just like reading, writing, and arithmetic, and not inherited. The wiser the training the quicker the child learns and the better he gets on in life. Look here, Aunt Sammy. I've got an article about all this written by a physician working with children at a well-known college. Why don't you loan that article to young Reginald's mother to read?"

I sat right down and read that article by Dr. Blanton and I agreed heartily with Uncle Ebenezzer. Would you be interested today in hearing a few of the ideas of this specialist in speech training? All in favor please vote "Aye." Opposed, vote "No." The ayes have it.

Some psychologists, says Dr. Blanton, believe that thinking is sub-vocal speech--that when we think we move the speech organs but without sound. Certainly there is a close relation between thinking and speech. One of the best tests of the normal child is his vocabulary. Without inner speech



thinking is confused, muddled and retarded. And without clear and normal vocal speech the child is unable to adjust himself to other children and feels strange and set apart from them. As a result feelings of inferiority and timidity may develop.

Don't children outgrow their speech defects? Some do, just as some children outgrow crooked feet or cross eyes. But often though the child outgrows the defect, still his adult speech is not so clear as it should be. And the speech defect is likely to hang on long enough to give him a feeling of inferiority, to make him unhappy, insecure or inadequate. These feelings may last through his life and make it hard for him to be happy and successful.

Speech is the most important means a child has for adjusting himself to the group. He soon discovers that he can get what he wants much better by asking for it than by crying, grunting, gesturing or screaming. But very naturally this growing-up process, this adjustment, is difficult and painful. The child fights to stay in his familiar infantile state. Sometimes he refuses to develop speech at all, sometimes he uses only a meaningless jargon, and sometimes he clings to his baby talk long after the period of infancy is past. So speech turns out to be a thermometer of the child's intellectual and emotional development.

Naturally physical defects hinder learning to speak. A child needs a normal brain, normal hearing and good health to learn this new art properly and at the right age. Deafness, marked rickets, severe malnutrition or prolonged illness at the ages from 10 to 20 months may prevent learning to speak at the usual time.

And then the right environment has a great deal to do with the matter. Probably there are some children who learn to talk whether it is expected of them or not. But ordinary speech comes because the child needs it, because his parents demand that he use speech to get what he wants. If, however, he gets everything he wants--attention, toys, food--through cries and gestures or through speech that remains infantile, he is quite likely to have no speech as late as five or six years, or poor speech even as late as ten years of age.

Occasionally lack of speech is the result of such poor handling that children become negative, as the psychologists say. They refuse to accept any suggestions or they do the opposite of what is asked of them. Even at the early age of two and a half years children are soon so extremely negative that they refuse to talk. This lack of speech is an indication that they have given up, for the time at least, efforts to adjust themselves to the group. The world has become too difficult and they unconsciously have chosen to remain in the infantile and pre-speech stage.

How does speech develop? The new-born baby has only a few primitive cries. At about the age of five months these early sounds develop into what is called the babble period, when he learns new sounds just because he enjoys using his vocal organs. He plays and experiments with the sounds made by having the tongue, lips and soft palate in different positions. During this period he makes hundreds of sounds, including many that will not be used later in ordinary speech. Also he imitates sounds he hears.

From eight to fifteen months the average child begins to associate the sounds he hears with things and situations. Parents can help in this process by talking to the child. Of course he will not understand at first, but he hears the rhythm of speech and the new words and wants to try to talk. The parents can also help by using appropriate words along with activities. On handing the child the milk bottle say "milk," just that one word and no more. When bathing the baby the mother can say "Shall I wash the ears now?" "hands?" and so on.

Though no rule can be laid down definitely on such matters, a normal child should have at the age of two a vocabulary of 200 to 600 words and he should be able to articulate the words so they can be understood.

The four speech defects which parents should notice and try to correct as early as possible are:

- First, lack of speech beyond the age of two and a half or three years.
- Second, murring or indistinct speech because the child does not use all the speech organs--lips, tongue, soft palate or jaws.
- Third, substituting the wrong letter sound. An example of this is lisping-- using th for s.
- Fourth, stuttering or stammering.

That's all about the child's speech.

Now we're going to have a few words about the child's food. Fond as I have always been of peanut butter from a very youthful age to the present, I never thought of making peanut butter soup. But the Recipe Lady not only thought of it but invented a recipe for it that is sure to be popular with every member of the family, especially the school children.

I'll give you this good recipe at once, if you'll take out your pencils, and when you have it all safely down in your notebook, I'll give you a menu for a school child's lunch which features this soup.

Ready for the ingredients?

- 1 quart of milk
- 4 tablespoons of flour
- 1/2 cup of peanut butter
- 2 teaspoons of salt
- 1 teaspoon of finely chopped onion
- Just five ingredients. I'll list them again. (Repeat.)

First heat 3 cups of milk in your double boiler. Then mix the remaining cup of milk with the flour and peanut butter. When this mixture is smooth, pour some of the hot milk into it. Then combine this with the hot milk in the double boiler. Add the salt and the onion and stir until the soup has thickened. Cook a few minutes longer and serve with crisp toast.

This easily made milk soup with the peanut flavor makes an excellent hot dish for the children to eat at noon. It would be suitable for a home lunch, for a lunch bought in the school cafeteria, or for the hot dish served at a rural school to supplement the cold lunch which the children

